

8. Transport, Movement and Accessibility

8.1 Introduction

Transport affects each and every one of us. It influences where we live, work, shop, enjoy leisure pursuits and where our children are educated. It also has a major impact on the environment and our health. The town centre is the most accessible location in the Borough, where the arterial transport routes meet and public transport hubs are located. Improving transport in Walsall town centre provides an opportunity to increase access to employment, education and training along with retail and leisure activities, increasing its position as the most sustainable location in the Borough. The AAP issues and options will inform the emerging Walsall 'Vision for Movement' which will in turn form part of the evidence base which supports the AAP preferred options document.

Jargon Buster

- **Transport Hubs:** A transport hub (also transport interchange) is a place where passengers and cargo are exchanged between vehicles or between transport modes. Public transport hubs include rail stations, rapid transit stations, bus stops and tram stop.

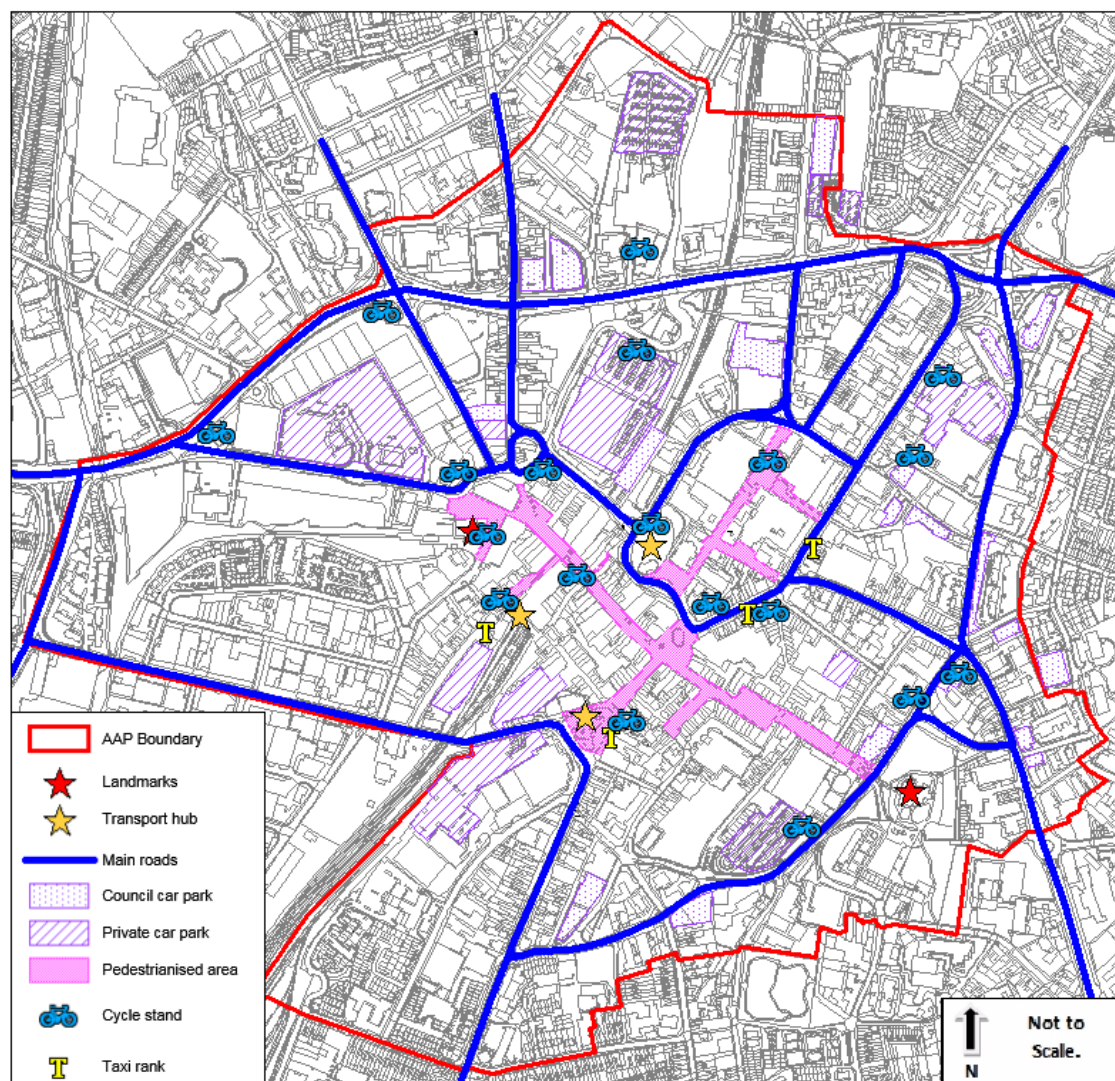


Figure 8.1: key transport features – public transport hubs, pedestrianised areas, major road networks

8.2 Pedestrian movements

The movement of pedestrians into and around the town centre is critical to its economic success. As **Figure 8.1** shows, pedestrianisation is a key feature of the town centre, with pedestrian movements prioritised along Park Street, Bradford Street and Darwall Street. The recent *Walsall Town Centre Survey (2010)* found that 85% of respondents rated pedestrian safety within the town centre as ‘good’ or ‘acceptable’.

As changes to the town centre continue, the impact on pedestrian movement is evident. A number of new pedestrian flows are evolving, particularly surrounding

access to the new Tesco store and Walsall College. There is a need to improve the quality of some of these evolving routes and to continue maintaining existing pedestrian areas across the town centre.

Park Street remains the retail core of the town providing a variety of shops and services, and at the northernmost point is Crown Wharf Retail Park. Access to this retail park from Park Street is severed by Wolverhampton Street. At this location motorists and pedestrian movements conflict and visibility is poor. Should the opportunity arise in the future as part of any redevelopment of the area, this area could be pedestrianised to improve safety and access.

There is a need to encourage people to stay longer in the town centre; this can be achieved by giving the town centre a sense of place, rather than the current link emphasis. At present the town centre encourages the movement of pedestrians to move from one place to another. Improving the public realm and using high quality materials will aid in causing visitors to spend more time in the town.

The movement of people within the town centre is largely influenced by the location of the three transport hubs. Accessibility between these routes needs to be improved so pedestrian journeys are quicker, safer and easier. An important component of this would be further way-finding improvements to ensure that, in particular, new visitors to the town arriving by public transport can easily navigate and find key destinations such as the Arboretum, art gallery, leather museum, Park Street and Crown Wharf.

Another option is to bring the hubs closer together, either by relocating them as shown in **Section 8.5**, or by creating new public transport links across the town centre, However this would require partial de-pedestrianisation of parts of the town centre to allow bus access, an example could be The Bridge to create a route between Bradford Place Interchange and St Paul's bus station. Other options could be to allow buses to access Park Street to bring bus stops into the heart of the town's main shopping street. In these options the 'shared space' concept could be used to encourage safe interaction between bus and pedestrian.

<u>Pedestrianisation</u>	
Pedestrianisation Option 1: The area between Crown Wharf Retail Park and Park Street is pedestrianised to encourage movement between the town centre and the retail park	Implications: The town centre is well connected, providing better links between the town centre and the retail park. There would however be implications for traffic movement.
Pedestrianisation Option 2: Through partial de-pedestrianisation buses could be allowed into the Bridge and/or Park Street areas to allow greater penetration into the town centre and easier links between public transport modes and services.	Implications: Loss of pedestrianisation could lead to safety concerns and people being dissuaded from using Park Street and the Bridge due to having to share it with buses.
Pedestrianisation Option 3: No further areas of pedestrianisation are identified through the AAP	Implications: There continues to be a physical separation between Park Street and the Crown Wharf Retail Park and in other locations across the town centre.

T:Q1 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

T:Q2 How should the AAP seek to improve pedestrian movement between the retail core, indoor shopping centres, transport interchanges and other important elements in the town centre?

8.3 Cycling

Although journeys on foot are crucial, cycling is a key mode of transport for local journeys and, as such, should be an integral part of transport, movement and accessibility. Walsall town centre benefits from being served by National Cycle Route 5, which runs from Oxford to Derby via Bridge Street, Walsall.

There are currently 30 separate cycle parking locations around the town centre, situated at key trip generators, such as the rail station, library and supermarkets. These stands are well used, but many cycles are often locked up in other 'informal' locations. This shows there is an obvious demand for cycle parking in the town centre and additional locations need to be considered. Cycle parking should be integrated into the street scene and not add to street clutter.

Incorporating methods such as 'shared-space' should be considered, especially in locations such as Bridge Street, a route which unauthorised vehicles often use. Better enforcement here, along with incorporating shared-space practices, would improve the town centre environment for pedestrians and cyclists, public transport and taxis.

8.4 Motorcycles

Motorcyclists share similar issues with cyclists and need specific consideration. At present there are currently 3 dedicated motorcycle parking locations. These are all secure, on-street facilities which are convenient for shops and services and are well used.

T:Q3 Is there any need for additional cycle routes in and to the town centre, if so where and why?

T:Q4 Where in the town centre should additional parking for cyclists and motorcyclists be provided?

8.5 Public Transport

Public transport is crucial for many residents, particularly given Walsall's population with its higher than average proportion of residents aged under 16 and over 65, who are most likely to rely on public transport. Public transport must strive to offer an attractive alternative to the car, as well as continuing to provide socially necessary services for the community.

Walsall has three public transport hubs: St. Paul's bus station, Bradford Place interchange, and Walsall rail station. St. Paul's and Bradford Place are both congested locations and impact upon the surrounding highway network. With a large volume of bus services travelling in and out of the town, it is essential that bus operators are encouraged to provide vehicles that meet current EU Emission Standards for heavy duty vehicles and bus engines. This would ensure that the bus element of public transport is playing its part in addressing air quality issues.

It is anticipated that the town centre will continue to have two separate locations for bus services, with one facility serving the north and west, and the other serving the south of the Borough. Along with Walsall railway station, this would result in the continued presence of three interchange hubs for public transport in the town centre. However, the AAP offers the opportunity to consider if this provision is the best solution, or if some consideration should be given to reducing the number of interchanges and providing an opportunity for one of the bus hubs to be more closely integrated with rail. These options are shown below and can be considered along with Pedestrian option 2, which proposes reducing pedestrianisation in order to link the bus stations together and bring buses into the heart of the town centre.

Figure 8.2 below shows the three options for public transport interchange improvements in the town centre. See **Table 5 in Appendix 1** for further details on the sites involved.

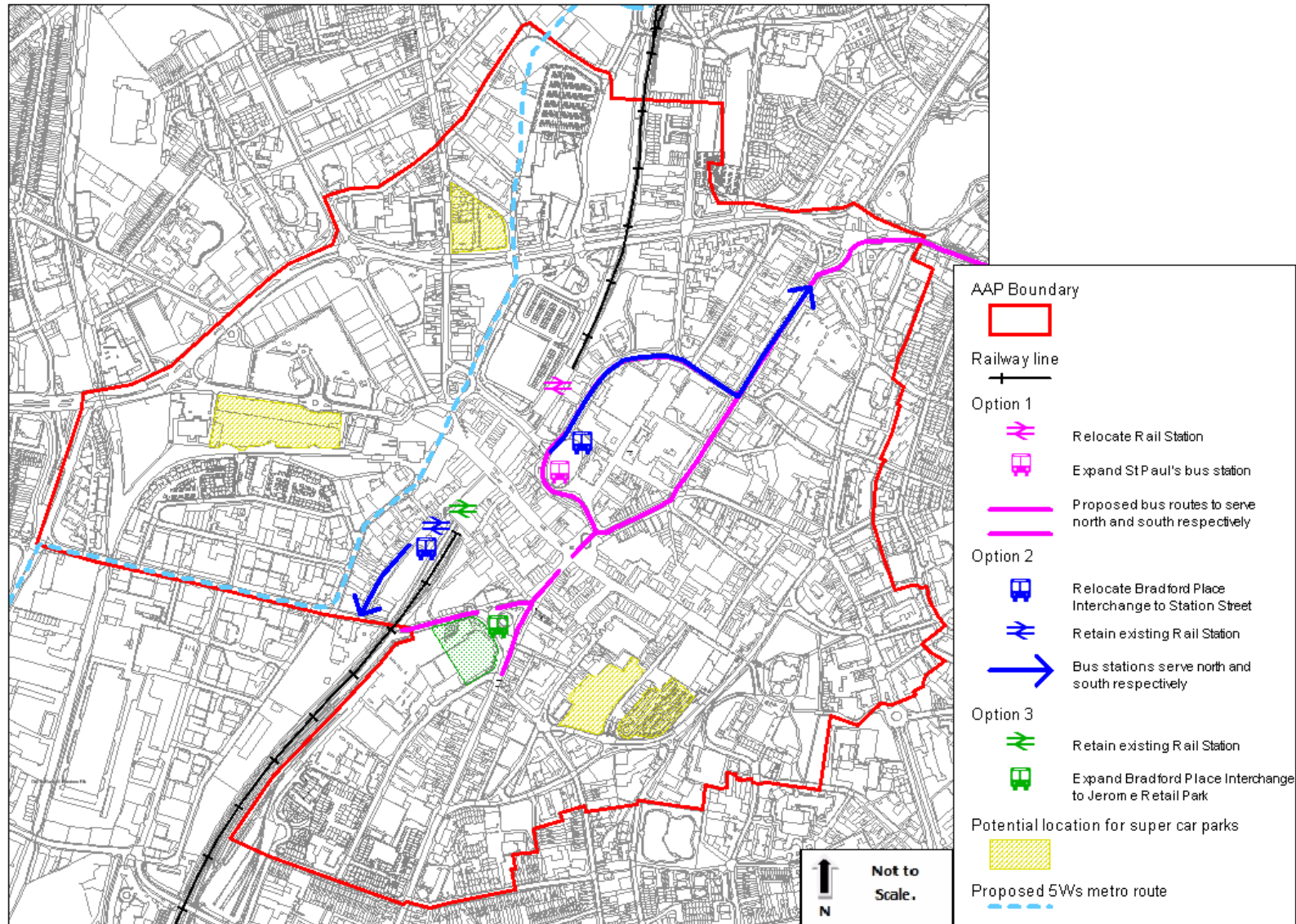


Figure 8.2: Public transport options

8.5.1 Re-develop St. Paul's into a larger more modern bus station

Walsall Town Centre Interchange

Having one large interchange would be preferable and given the continuing regeneration of the north side of the town, St. Paul's should be retained and expanded. It provides an accessible location for commuters, shoppers and for accessing further education at Walsall College. With this option, consideration could be given to the possible relocation of Walsall railway station to the location of Hatherton Road car park. However, given the way that the town has developed it may not be practical to achieve this unless some areas are de-pedestrianised to allow buses from the south and west to get across to the new facility. Relocating the rail station will also pose a significant logistical and financial challenge.

8.5.2 A new multi-modal facility at Station Street

Station Street Interchange

This option would allow for buses currently using the Bradford Place Interchange to be re-routed to Station Street. This could provide the opportunity for Bradford Place to then be redeveloped as a public space with a memorial garden centred around the cenotaph. This option would greatly improve the interchange for bus, taxis and rail. It would also bring the facility closer to the middle of town, especially as much of the regeneration activity has taken place to the north of the centre in recent years. The presence of the low bridge at Bridgeman Street would be an issue and would require major support from the bus operators and Network Rail.

8.5.3 Redevelop Bradford Place Interchange

This option would retain bus services in the Bradford Street area. However the existing facility is no longer adequate to cater for the volume of services that currently operate from this location, and additional provision could be achieved by expansion into Jerome Retail Park. Consideration must be given to retaining a transport interchange in the area if option 2 above is not feasible.

Each of these options presents major issues in relation to funding and delivery. These would need to be explored in more detail to further understand individual issues surrounding each proposal.

<u>Public Transport</u>	
Public Transport Option 1: Re-develop St. Paul's into a bus station with larger capacity	Implications: This would deliver one centralised bus station with close proximity to the rail station, which would increase accessibility to the town centre. However this would require large detours for buses or the de-pedestrianisation of The Bridge, and have implications for neighbouring land uses.
Public Transport Option 2: Development of a new multi-modal facility at Station Street	Implications: This would result in a much improved bus/rail interchange. There would however be implications for the railway station car park.
Public Transport Option 3: Redevelop Bradford Place Interchange to create larger capacity by expanding into Jerome Retail Park	Implications: Creating extra capacity will improve passenger experience, safety and the reliability of services, but would have implications for neighbouring land uses.
Public Transport Option 4: No major public transport changes are identified through the AAP	Implications: As demand rises, public transport will face further pressure, resulting in less reliable services, causing more car dependency and potentially impact upon the economic growth prospects of the town centre.

T:Q5 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

T:Q6 What improvements do you think are needed to public transport to and around the centre?

8.5.5 Rapid Transit Links

Proposals are being developed along with Centro for a Bus Rapid Transit system (SPRINT) between Walsall town centre and Birmingham city centre. This will be a completely new public transport option built around enhancing the image of public transport and further improving the connectivity between Walsall and Birmingham. In addition to this the BCCS identifies Mass Rapid Transit links between major centres as being critical to the growth of the economy and residents' access to services. The aspiration for Walsall has been the 5Ws Metro proposal serving

Wolverhampton, Wednesfield, Willenhall, Walsall and Wednesbury, and **Figure 8.2** shows the proposed route through the town centre. However in the BCCS it was accepted that other forms of Mass Rapid Transit could be used to gain the same or similar benefits. This includes tram – trains using a mix of current heavy rail lines and new tram lines – amongst others.

8.5.6 Walsall's Rail Network

More than one in three (34.8%) of Walsall residents commute to work in Birmingham and nearly one in eight workers employed in Walsall (12.1%) travel from Birmingham. However for a Borough of 269,000 residents connections are poor. Whilst Walsall's link to Birmingham is adequate (although a 10 minute service would be more beneficial), it has no links beyond Birmingham or outside the region. This situation will be partially alleviated when the Chase Line is electrified and line speeds improved in the next rail funding period (2014-19). As well as large regional benefits, this will also give the opportunity for Walsall to gain direct services to cities in the north west and south of the country, and as an alternative route for trains using the congested Birmingham to Stafford section of the West Coast main line.

Ultimately these improvements will lead to more trains stopping at Walsall station. Anticipating these service enhancements, the currently dated station requires updating and extra capacity creating. Walsall Council are working with Centro to create a station masterplan. This includes redesigning the station concourse and introducing an extra platform opposite platform 3. An extra platform would give a 33% increase in capacity allowing more trains to serve the station and more flexibility in service provision. The redesign could be incorporated in a larger reconfiguration of the Saddler's Shopping Centre. The benefit of a wider scheme would be the opportunity to give the rail station more presence in the town centre to benefit its improved services and encourage more people to use sustainable modes to access the town centre.

Improvements in rail infrastructure will have a positive impact on the growth of the town centre and the Borough as a whole, with planned government investment in High Speed 2 (HS2) linking Birmingham to London in less than an hour. It is

important that Walsall's rail capacity is enhanced to make the most of these improvements within the national infrastructure.

<u>Walsall Rail Station</u>	
Rail Station Option 1: The AAP proposes the redesign and expansion of the railway station to create greater capacity	Implications: This will impact positively on the economic growth prospects of the Borough, enabling local rail services to be improved and increase the possibility of attracting national rail services. However there may be implications for the Saddler's Shopping Centre.
Rail Station Option 2: The AAP promotes the railway station as a transport hub but does not seek to enhance its capacity	Implications: Current situation is maintained with minor improvements to some local services. However the full economic benefit of improving the rail network is not achieved.

T:Q7 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

8.5.7 Taxi and Private Hire Provision

Bus and rail services are complemented by the provision of taxi services. There is a long-standing issue in the town centre regarding the provision of taxi ranks. At present there are five official ranks with approximately 42 spaces, however the number of licensed hackney carriages totals 128. There is a need to provide more ranks in strategic locations around the town to better cater for anticipated growth in the night time economy.

<u>Taxis</u>	
Taxis Option 1: The AAP identifies the locations for additional taxi ranks	Implications: Additional taxi ranks are located in convenient locations which serve the needs of the community, enabling traffic in the town centre to flow more easily, and making the town centre attractive to a wider range of customers.
Taxis Option 2: The AAP does not identify additional locations for taxi ranks	Implications: Additional locations for taxi ranks are not identified, which may mean they do not meet customer needs

<p>Taxis Option 3: The AAP reviews the location of all taxi ranks</p>	<p>Implications: Taxi ranks are located at strategic points, best meeting the needs of town centre users</p>
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T:Q8 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

T:Q9 Do you consider the amount of available taxi ranks to be an issue? Where should additional ranks be located?

8.5.8 Coach Services

Further improvements to public transport could be achieved through the vibrant coach passenger market in Walsall. At present Walsall is served by National Express coach services travelling to London, Birmingham, Shrewsbury and Telford. National Express in the past has indicated it would like to provide Walsall with additional services. The existing access to coach travel in the town centre is limited and inadequate. There is a need to provide better waiting facilities for coach passengers closely linked to improved taxi rank provision and private vehicle drop off points as well as integration with other public transport modes such as rail and bus.

<u>Coach Facilities</u>	
<p>Coach Facilities Option 1: The AAP identifies the locations for coach stopping facilities</p>	<p>Implications: More coaches are encouraged to serve Walsall town Centre improving the transport offer to the town making it more attractive to a wider range of visitors.</p>
<p>Coach Facilities Option 2: No coach stopping facilities are identified through the AAP</p>	<p>Implications: The location for such facilities would not be identified, which may mean they are not in the best location and do not attract new services and customers.</p>

T:Q10 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

T:Q11 Where should coach stopping facilities be provided in the town centre? Should this be linked to the redevelopment of the transport hubs?

8.6 Road Network

Walsall has 845km of main roads that connects people to jobs, services and other activities, with excellent links from the national strategic highway network. M6 junctions 7, 9 and 10 all lie within or just outside the Borough, providing access for long distance travel and bringing visitors and goods to the Borough. Within the town centre boundary, the local roads can at times experience congestion due to large traffic flows, the impact of new developments and occasional diverted traffic from the M6 motorway.

8.6.1 Air Pollution:

Air pollution remains a major issue in the Borough with road traffic being the main contributor to adverse air quality, a significant issue in the town centre. Poor air quality affects the health and well-being of local people living along key corridors which carry high volumes of traffic.

The review and assessment of air quality is a statutory function that all local authorities must undertake. The purpose of this is to demonstrate to central government that action is being taken to improve poor air quality and meet UK and EU standards. In a national context, outside of London, the West Midlands conurbation has the worst nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) problems in the UK.

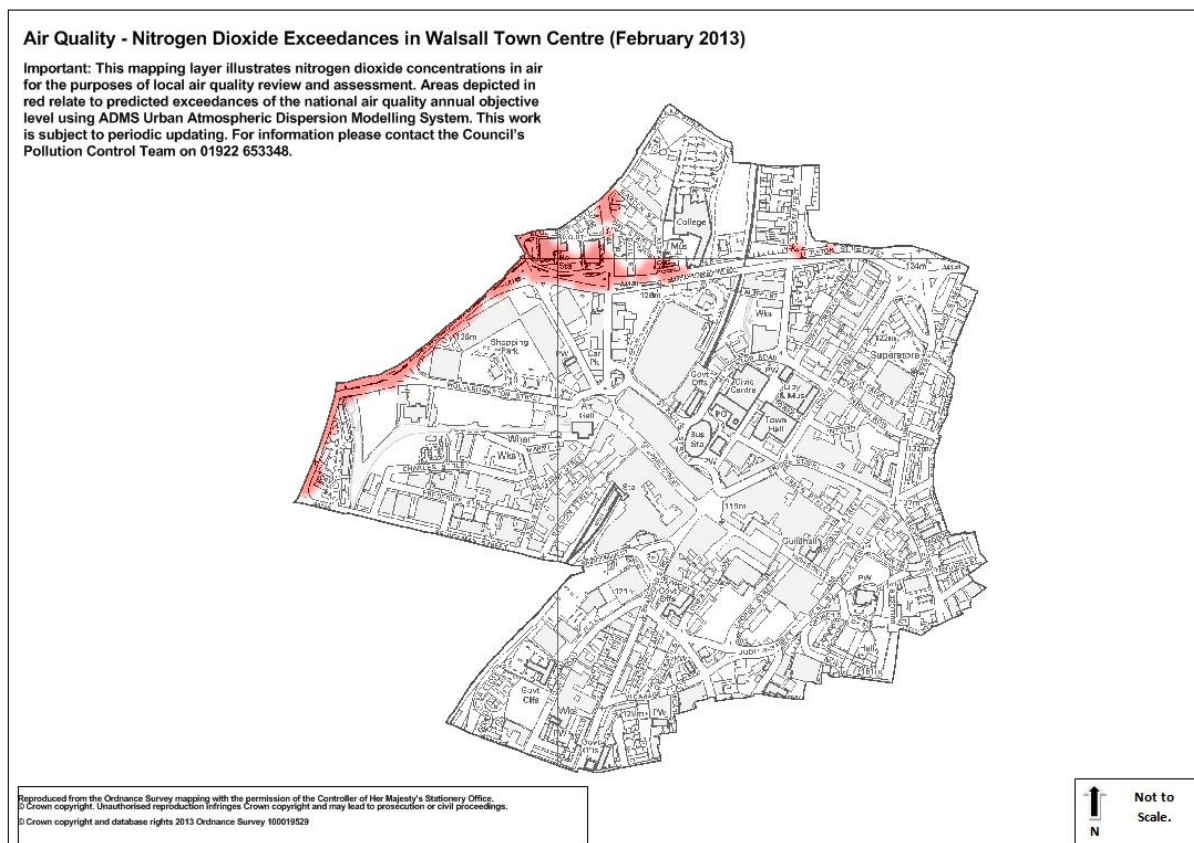


Figure 8.3: NO₂ exceedences in Walsall town centre (Feb 2013)

8.6.2 Mitigation Measures

The West Midlands Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3) aims to reduce transport emissions in the West Midlands and surrounding areas. Its aims include five key objectives of which one focuses solely on climate change. It states: *'To contribute towards tackling climate change through achieving a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and ensure the resilience of the transport system to any changes to the West Midlands Metropolitan Area's climate.'*

The seven West Midlands metropolitan authorities are currently developing a Low Emissions Towns and Cities Programme. This aims to deliver a series of integrated projects designed to reduce road transport emissions that will address national air quality objectives. One element of this is to investigate and quantify options and opportunities for Low Emission Zones. The outcome of this project will likely inform the management of air quality in Walsall town centre in the future.

The transition to low emission vehicles is an important factor for moving towards a low carbon economy. Walsall Council has joined the Midlands' Plugged in Places consortium and work is continuing to seek out opportunities regarding the introduction of electric vehicle infrastructure within the town centre.

Over the past few years, the strategic routes leading to Walsall town centre have all undergone significant upgrades to improve traffic flow, reduce congestion and partly address air quality. However there are still significant challenges relating to the management of traffic and how users access the town centre. Walsall Council works with Centro ITA and Public Transport operators to encourage town centre users to arrive on sustainable transport. However we also recognise that this is not always possible and that a balance needs to be found between encouraging public transport use, and making the town accessible for private car users and HGVs.

8.6.3 Freight Access

The town centre relies on road freight to bring in goods to its commercial and retail businesses as there is currently no rail freight access. There is also no Intermodal Rail Freight Terminal (IRFT) in the Black Country to interchange between road and rail freight. So, whilst the aspiration would be to increase the use of more sustainable means of freight distribution, in the short to medium term there is a need to make the town centre more accessible for both LGVs and HGVs.

In the longer term, the Stourbridge – Walsall – Lichfield line will hopefully increase freight capacity in the town by enabling the construction of an IRFT and/or more rail heads in the vicinity of or alongside a regional logistics site. The Council is working with the Black Country LEP to examine ways to make freight movements in the town more efficient, specifically looking at access to and along the ring road. Issues raised have included inefficient use of traffic lights in off peak periods causing lorries to have to stop unnecessarily, a lack of lorry parking in the Borough and allocation of road space to sustainable modes of travel among others.

<u>Road Network</u>	
Road Network Option 1: The AAP sets more stringent air quality standards for buses operating within the town centre	Implications: The air quality of the town centre would be improved, resulting in a more attractive environment.
Road Network Option 2: The Council works with businesses (such as retailers) and bus operators to encourage the take up of cleaner, low carbon and low emission vehicles to minimise the adverse impacts of vehicles on emissions	Implications: This could result in some improvements in air quality in the town centre.
Road Network Option 3: The AAP recognises the issues around the air quality but sets no standards or process by which to reduce emissions within the town centre	Implications: Air Quality issues in the town centre are not improved and may possibly get worse

T:Q12 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

T:Q13 What are the issues that you consider to be significant for road traffic movement in and around Walsall town centre?

8.7 Parking

The main issues relating to parking in the town centre are the type of parking available (long or short stay), the amount, the location of car parks and the price. The parking strategy in Walsall aims to establish a coordinated and consistent approach to parking.

Council car parks are designated as either short or long stay, with a charging regime for both types that is applied across the town centre. Other off-street parking spaces are within privately owned car parks with varying charging structures. On any given day, approximately 40-50% of spaces are not occupied, though this varies from car park to car park.

The locations of car parks in the town centre, directly off the highway, poses problems for the efficiency of the wider highway network. There is a need to review

the locations of car parks, particularly as the town continues its regeneration programme.

8.7.1 Parking Enforcement

To address the issue of abuse of on-street short stay car parking and other parking contraventions, Civil Parking Enforcement was introduced in April 2009. After the establishment and assessment of a formalised parking enforcement system, the way that parking is provided within the town centre can be evaluated. Parking has a significant effect on whether users of the town choose to visit or not. . The *Walsall Town Centre Survey (2010)* found that car parking was rated the worst aspect of the town centre, with 47% rating it as 'poor', and 38% saying it had got worse in the previous five years.

8.7.2 Council Parking Stock Review

The Council, as the provider of approximately 25% of all off-street parking in the town centre, is currently reviewing its strategic approach to town centre parking. This review may conclude that the location and quality of a number of the Council's car parks are poor, and fewer strategically located high quality 'super' car parks should be introduced to serve the town centre. This would enable some car parks to be developed for other uses and enable the Council to assert greater control over the management of the highway network. Any new car parks should include electric vehicle recharging infrastructure to help meet air quality requirements.

<u>Car Parking</u>	
Car Parking Option 1: The AAP allocates land for 'super' car parks in locations that serve the town centre and take into account the proposed redevelopment	Implications: This will enable 'super' car parks to support investment anticipated in the town centre, making it more attractive to a wider range of potential users. It will also improve the strategic highway network, pedestrian safety and air quality.
Car Parking Option 2: The AAP sets out an approach to rationalising current car park provision without providing for 'super' car parks	Implications: Whilst this may result in some under-utilised car parks being developed for other purposes, this will not assist the anticipated investment in the town centre and may deter some potential users.

<p>Car Parking Option 3: No strategic approach is identified for the location of car parks within the town centre</p>	<p>Implications: The current car parking offer remains difficult to navigate for town centre users and acts as a barrier to customers and those making investment decisions.</p>
<p>Car Parking Option 4: The AAP sets a consistent approach to parking charges for all off-street parking provision in the town centre</p>	<p>Implications: This would result in a more attractive car parking offer to customers and businesses. Controlling the price may result in a loss of competition which may mean some car parks chose to close.</p>
<p>Car Parking Option 5: The AAP sets no standard approach to off-street car parking charges</p>	<p>This would result in no control over car parking prices, which may lead to high prices which deter customers.</p>

T:Q14 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

T:Q15 Where should car parks be located to cater for the regeneration of the town centre?

T:Q16 Does car parking play an essential role in your decision to travel into Walsall town centre? What changes are needed to car parking in your view?